



Children's Assessment Center

Assessing, supporting, and caring for child victims of suspected sexual assault.

TALKING TO YOUR KIDS . . . ABOUT SEXUAL ABUSE

Talking with our children about inappropriate touching is something that all parents have a difficult time doing, but it is something that all parents must do in order to protect their children.

The best time to talk with your child about body safety is before you suspect something may have happened. If you find yourself wondering if something may have already happened to your child, it is often difficult to know how to approach this topic and how to start a conversation. You may find yourself in this position for various reasons. Those reasons may include, but are not limited to:

- Your child is displaying sexualized behaviors.
- Your child is scared of someone he or she used to enjoy spending time with or may be afraid of going to a certain place.
- Your child is more withdrawn, sad, or angry than normal.
- Your child was exposed to someone who was recently accused or charged with child sexual conduct.
- You notice that someone else wants to spend more time with your child than you do.

With a child of any age, open communication is the most important way to prevent child abuse. Children will talk to parents about unwanted touches if they know that their parents will support and listen to them. To talk with your children about body safety, you can:

- **Ask: Do you know about touches that are not okay for you to receive on your body?** *Explain that touches to the private parts of their body are not okay and it is important to tell a trusted adult about these kinds of touches. Parents can teach their children that it is only okay for someone to touch the private parts of their bodies when they are helping to keep them clean or healthy.*
- **Talk with your child about how some touches may seem appropriate, like a hug or a kiss, but can still make them feel uncomfortable.** *Reinforce that the child needs to talk to a trusted adult about uncomfortable touches or situations.*
- **Never force your child to give hugs or kisses they are not comfortable with, including grandma, grandpa, and other relatives.** *Let your child know that it is his or her body and he or she can always tell someone "NO" if the touch he or she is receiving is unwanted or disliked.*

It is important that children have names for the private parts of their body that both the child and the parents understand and know. This makes it easier for you to talk about the subject.

*** Remember: the more comfortable you are talking about this topic, the more comfortable your child will be talking to you about touches that they receive that make them feel uncomfortable or that are not okay. Good communication will increase the chance that your child will tell you if abuse has occurred.*

This can be a difficult subject to approach, but it can be made easier if you look for teachable moments, such as bath time. You also might find it easier to bring up the topic through one of the following books:

- [Please Tell! A child's story about sexual abuse](#), written and illustrated by Jessie
- [My Very Own Special Body Book](#), Kerry Bassett
- [It's My Body](#), Lory Freeman
- [Loving Touches](#), Lory Freeman
- [The Right Touch: A Read-Aloud Story To Help Prevent Child Sexual Abuse](#), Sandy Kleven
- [Know and Tell: A Workbook for Parents and Children on How to Prevent Child Abuse](#), Yvette K. Lehman
- [Your Body Belongs to You](#), Cornelia Spelman
- [No More Secrets for Me](#), Oralee Watcher

{Turn over for Important Notes about talking to your children}

Important Notes

- It is okay to ask your child if she has ever received a touch to the body that she didn't like or that made her feel uncomfortable. *Do not directly ask if she received touches to the private parts of her body.*
- Reassure your child that it is okay for him to talk with you about unwanted touches, because your job is to help him stay safe. Remind him that it is never okay to keep secrets about "not okay" or unwanted touches.
- If kids say that they received an uncomfortable touch, *do not assume that you know what they are talking about.* Instead, ask them to explain and describe to you what happened. Your child may tell you about a hit or a push he or she received from another child.

Please seek professional help and do not further question your child if:

- Your child indicates that he or she received touches to the private parts of the body or was forced to touch someone on private parts.
 - *Parents can, and should, reassure the child that they are glad that the child told and that they will always love the child.*
 - *Parents can praise and comfort their child.*
 - *It is important to listen quietly and calmly, without asking questions. If a parent overreacts to a child's disclosure of abuse or if the parent gives messages of disbelief, the child will often shut down and refuse to tell more.*
 - *It is important not to place blame on the child by asking why he or she did not tell sooner.*
- The child seems uncomfortable, scared, or resistant to talk about this topic.
- The child demonstrates concerning behaviors: anger, depression, sexualized behaviors, regressive behaviors.

Report any disclosures of abuse or concerns to your local law enforcement agency or Child Protective Services. They will assist you in helping your child stay safe.

Grand Rapids Police Department 616.456.3400
Kent County Sheriff's Department 616.632.6100
Child Protective Services 616.247.6300

If you need more information or assistance in talking with your child about "okay" and "not okay" touches, please contact the Assessment Specialist at the Children's Assessment Center: 616.336.5160.